

# New guide for managers to detect Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease

**February 22, 2019** – *A coral disease that was first documented in Florida is now being reported in some parts of the Caribbean. A new guide from MPACConnect seeks to help Caribbean marine natural resource managers who are responsible for priority coral reef marine protected areas to be on the alert for this disease and to detect whether it is occurring on their coral reefs.*

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease spreads rapidly and affects some of the slowest-growing and longest-lived reef-building corals, including the iconic brain corals, star corals and pillar corals. Scientists are uncertain about the cause of the disease, but it appears to be water-borne and can be spread by contact.

This disease is now appearing in parts of the Caribbean, including Mexico, Jamaica and the US Virgin Islands, and it is also suspected in some other locations. Early detection of the disease and its correct identification are important to permit actions to monitor, treat and restore affected coral reefs.

“Through this new infographic we’re making the latest knowledge about this emerging threat to coral reefs accessible to marine protected area (MPA) managers across the Caribbean region,” explained Ms. Emma Doyle, Coordinator of MPACConnect.

“The poster summarizes the key technical knowledge needed for the detection and identification of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, as learned during an exchange visit to Florida for Mexican MPA managers at the end of 2018. We’re pleased to now share this knowledge with other managers in the MPACConnect network and beyond,” she added.



Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease can be confused with other coral diseases, with bleaching and with fish bites. The guide has user-friendly graphics and practical tips to familiarize managers with the coral species that are most susceptible to the disease and to help them understand the factors that must be observed and monitored in the field in order to correctly identify the disease.

The guide lists practical steps that managers can take to help prevent further spread of the disease. Proactive communications are needed with stakeholders in the dive, tourism, fishing and shipping industries to promote reporting of suspected cases, to ensure the disinfection of dive gear, and to apply best management of ballast and waste water from ships. We hope the guide will equip managers to advise their agencies and stakeholders about this new threat.

“While we work to monitor this new disease and to develop effective treatment protocols, we have to do everything possible to build the resilience of coral reefs by reducing the other threats that are well known to us. This means joining forces with scientists, authorities and communities, ensuring full compliance with fisheries and MPA regulations, and applying best MPA management practices,” urged Ms. Dana Wusinich-Mendez, Team Lead for the Atlantic and Caribbean at NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program.

MPAConnect is a partnership between the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute, the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program and 30 marine protected areas in 10 countries and territories. Go to <https://www.gcfi.org/emerging-issues-florida-coral-disease-outbreak/> to download the printable poster or a smaller file for electronic sharing. For more information please contact [mpaconnect@gcfi.org](mailto:mpaconnect@gcfi.org)